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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Lebanon, Peace Process,
Palestinian Territories, Iraq (9/7)

11. Summary: Syrian papers today continued to focus on Lebanon, highlighting the visit to Lebanon by a Syrian popular delegation that represented social and parliamentary activists, in addition to Moslem and Christian clergymen. The intent of the visit was to confirm Syria's popular and formal support for the Lebanese people and the Resistance. The delegation met with President Lahoud, Speaker Nabih Berri, and Lebanon's Grand Mufti, Mohammed Rashid Qabani.

Headlines also featured reports on the gradual lifting of the Israeli siege on Lebanon and cited a press statement by General Aoun calling for a national unity government.

The Middle East peace process was also prominent in the papers. Headlines reported Italian PM Prodi's message to President Asad about peace proposals in the region, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem's visit to Cairo to take part in the 126th session of the Arab League Ministerial meeting, and a statement by Russian FM Lavrov confirming that peace in the region cannot be achieved without moving on the Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian tracks.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad receives a letter from Italian PM Prodi dealing with the situation in the region" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/6)

"With the participation of FM al-Mouallem, the 126th session of the Arab League Ministerial supports Syria's demand to restore the occupied Golan, rejects US sanctions on Syria, and demands an active mechanism to resume peace negotiations" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/7)

"Lahoud and Berri receive the Syrian popular delegation. Lahoud: Syria has always been a real supporter of Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/7)

"Lebanese Minister of Energy Fneish praises Syrian efforts to restore electricity in Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/7)

"Israel will lift siege on Lebanon today. Aoun demands a national unity government and says: International forces will not give us peace" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/7)

"Lavrov confirms that Hizbollah is legitimate, not imported, national resistance and that peace cannot be achieved in the region without moving on the three tracks" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/7)

"7 Palestinians martyred, more than 30 wounded in the Gaza Strip. The EU demands that Israel stop settlement activities" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/7)

"Britain will send additional forces to Iraq. Nine Iraqis killed, 36 injured in various explosions in Baghdad" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/7)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Allegiance to Lebanon or Someone Else?"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (9/7): "Israel continues to violate Resolution 1701 on Lebanon, and the United States is turning a blind eye to these serious Israeli violations of a resolution that was drafted by the Bush administration itself...."

"Resolution 1701 came to save Israel from a predicament into which it pushed itself. When the military hostilities ended, the US Administration was no longer interested in the implementation of the other clauses of the resolution. America's friends and John Bolton's Lebanese team made no moves to lift the blockade or to force Israel to withdraw from the territories it occupied. Indeed, these friends and the Bolton team found a good opportunity to continue their attack on the Resistance with unprecedented viciousness and unlimited insolence. They also found sufficient time to attack Syria and its positions in a stunningly systematic manner and through an enviable distribution of roles, while they were extremely polite and timid toward the Israeli aggressor, not to mention their complete silence on the Zionist espionage and sabotage networks, which began to emerge and fall apart...."

"Another Defeat for the US Administration"

Ahmad Burghul, a commentator in government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (9/7): "Steadfastness of the Lebanese Resistance in the face of the Israeli war machine proved a number of facts, primarily that the scenarios for changing the region by force and through foreign dictates can only fail, and that the future of the Arab region is determined only by its peoples. This must be a lesson for the US Administration before it becomes a lesson to Israel...."

"The neoconservatives in Washington were behind the war that Israel launched on Lebanon.... They exchanged roles with the war criminals in the Zionist entity to move the region decades back, destroy Arab capabilities, and attack the regimes and forces that still block the implementation of the American-Zionist plan that seeks to produce a new Middle East submissive to the American-Israeli will...."

"When Annan Criticizes Israel"

Ahmad Hamadah, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/7): "Arabs and the United Nations are the main victims of the domination of superpowers, led by the United States, over the international organization, its role, and its resolutions. Successive US administrations have used their weight in the organization's agencies to invalidate resolutions that call on Israel to implement Security Council resolutions...."

"UN Secretary General Kofi Annan condemned Israel for its use of cluster bombs in Lebanon, but this is not enough.... Annan's condemnation and the establishment of an international team to investigate this issue are positive steps. But they are not enough to force Israel to respect international legitimacy. The international organization must play its full role in implementing Security Council resolutions that call on Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories. It must force Israel to recognize the right of return for Palestinian refugees and to implement Resolution 194. This is the only way for the organization to regain its confiscated independent decision-making authority."

"Where Is the Arab Challenge?"

Umar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (9/7): "Ever since the terrorist Israeli aggression on Lebanon stopped, the United Nations has appeared as if begging Israel to implement Resolution 1701, although Americans tailored the resolution more to serve Israel and its wishes than to

benefit Lebanon....

"American and European pressure is directed at Lebanon, even though, Lebanon has implemented the resolution.... The US Administration does only what Israel wants and acts only to serve Israel's interests.... The strangest thing is that Arab efforts to help Lebanon in these difficult circumstances are crippled....

"Israel is engaged in procrastinations and maneuvers and is defying international legitimacy. The Arab challenge, therefore, must be serious. It must not feel content with media statements or with some financial assistance to Lebanon. It is inconceivable that the entire Arab nation lacks the means to support its just causes."

"'The True Pledge' and Swap of Prisoners"

Ahmad Suwwan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, said (9/7): "Kofi Annan's announcement that he will appoint a representative to negotiate a swap of prisoners between Hizbollah and Israel proves that Israel has failed to impose the condition that it offered before and during its war on Lebanon as the excuse for the war....

"Israel has failed to achieve any of its objectives in the war. After the Israeli defeat, the issue of the two captured Israeli soldiers returned to square one, and Hizbollah kept its pledge that the two Israelis would not be released except through indirect negotiations and an exchange of prisoners....

"Thanks to the Resistance, Israel was unable to obtain the release of the two soldiers...."

Corbin